

February 12, 2001

The Honorable Marilyn Rasmussen, Chair
Senate Agriculture and International Trade Committee
Post Office Box 40482
Olympia, Washington 98504-0482

Dear Senator Rasmussen:

At last Wednesday's hearing on SB 5675, regarding the review of food service regulations, Senator Swecker asked the Department of Health to provide the Committee with additional information about the food safety advisory committee we are organizing. I am pleased to provide you with that additional information, along with my commitment to working cooperatively with all our stakeholders who have an interest in the issue of food safety.

We are creating "Partners in Food Safety," a coalition of stakeholders brought together to discuss food service regulation and food safety. We have set a tentative date of March 19, 2001 for the initial meeting of this new committee. The "Partners in Food Safety" will meet two or three times a year on an ongoing basis to share information and discuss issues of common concern related to retail food safety in Washington State. It takes the place of the Food Safety Enhancement Advisory Committee, which provided a similar forum up until a few years ago.

Committee Goals. The committee will have the following goals:

Examining the need for amendments to the state's retail food regulations: At the first meeting, the agenda will include a discussion about needed amendments to the state's retail food service rules. It is likely a sub-committee of this group will be formed to more actively pursue this issue in depth. A major consideration will be whether to pursue state adoption of the FDA Model Food Code or to simply amend our current state rules. Copies of the FDA Model Food Code will be given to participants, along with an invitation to join a subcommittee to actively pursue this issue.

Sharing of Information and Addressing Issues of Common Concern: There are a wide variety of food service establishments in the state, and a number of state and local

agencies and academic programs involved in food safety science and regulation. The committee can serve as a clearinghouse for issues and questions and the sharing of information and new developments.

Identifying Resources and Infrastructure to Ensure a Safe Food Supply in Washington: In connection with a review of the rules for food service regulation, the committee will examine how services are currently provided and the resources, private and public, available to ensure a comprehensive retail food safety system in the state.

In addition, within the next 30 days, Department staff will work closely with representatives of the food service industry to identify specific areas of concern, such as inconsistencies in statewide enforcement and interpretation, with respect to the retail food service regulations. We will then act on each of these concerns, by including them in the discussion of rule revision, if appropriate. It may also be the case that a more timely resolution could be obtained by forwarding them to the Environmental Health Directors Food Committee or other appropriate bodies for consideration.

Timeline: By December 2001, we will report our findings to the State Board of Health and recommend a course of action with regard to updating the retail food service rules. Making the revisions that are recommended would be a long-term goal. It may take several years to review the various specific sections of the rule and finalize a draft acceptable to all stakeholders.

We have tentatively planned for two or three yearly meetings of the entire committee. Much of the work with more specialized issues will be accomplished in subcommittees for which those who are interested volunteer. These smaller groups will likely meet more frequently. We envision that the committee will continue to meet as a forum for discussion and a clearinghouse for ideas after recommendations are submitted in December 2001.

Committee Membership: Participants who are to be invited to join the *Partners in Food Safety* group will include representatives of the Washington Food Industry; the Washington Restaurant Association; the Northwest Food Processors Association; the Washington State Department of Agriculture; the U.S. Food and Drug Administration; the U.S. Department of Agriculture; the State Board of Health; local health jurisdictions; the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Puget Consumers Cooperative; the WSU Cooperative Extension; representatives of food service unions, such as the United Food and Commercial Workers, and the Operating Engineers; and legislative representatives.

The group is larger than that proposed in SB 5675, but we believe that the larger group can fairly represent the broad range of interests involved in food safety. Subcommittees for more specialized issues will allow for more focused discussions on specific issues. The membership list has not been set, and we welcome suggestions about who

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participates. In particular, we would welcome your suggestions about involving legislators or legislative staff.

Anticipated Outcomes: We anticipate recommendations for revisions to the food safety regulations will be submitted to the State Board of Health and the Legislature by December 2001. The committee will likely make recommendations about the resources and infrastructure needed to provide a comprehensive food safety system that protects all of the state's citizens.

An ongoing benefit of the committee will be the ability to discuss and resolve issues that involve the application of, changes to, and advances in the regulation and science of food safety.

The Department of Health is looking forward to working with all public and private sector stakeholders to continue to improve the safety of our food supply. Thank you for your interest in food safety and the health of the people in Washington State

Sincerely,

Mary C. Selecky
Secretary

cc: Members, Senate Agriculture and International Trade Committee
Senator Bob Morton
Representative Gary Chandler
Representative Kelli Linville
Representative Steve Conway
John Thayer
Vicki Kirkpatrick
Amy Brackenbury
Jan Gee
Kit Hawkins
Joe Daniels